



• **Courtesy of Louise Greenberg** | Louise Greenberg with John Alexander, director of the Pacific Chorale and past president of Chorus America, who presented her with the Chorus America Distinguished Service Award.

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## **Louise Greenberg presented with Chorus America Distinguished Service Award**

By Susan L. Pena

Louise Greenberg likes to joke that she never let her career as a biochemist and neuropharmacologist interfere with her singing.

But in truth, she has done what few people have managed: to live a double life in which neither has been shortchanged.

### **TODAY'S SPONSOR:**

On the one hand, she has earned a master's degree from Bryn Mawr College in biochemistry, and later her Ph.D. in neuropharmacology, after which she spent years teaching in the pharmacology department of the Medical College of Philadelphia (now Drexel University College of Medicine) and publishing her research on the aging brain.

But, remarkably, she has had a full career as a choral singer, founder and administrator - so much so that she was recently presented with the Chorus America Distinguished Service Award in its 2016 conference in Cincinnati. The award was given for her work on the boards of six choruses, and on the board of Chorus America itself for 11 years.

Sitting in one of the comfortable public rooms in The Heritage in Green Hills, where she has lived since 2010, Greenberg reminisced about her musical experiences, her blue eyes sparkling with humor and intelligence.

"I sang in the (Mount Penn) high school chorus and in a girls' octet," she said, "and in the chorus at Dickinson College. I never studied voice until after I graduated, although I could read music very well because I played the clarinet."

She said her father sent her to a psychologist at Albright College when she was in 11th grade for aptitude testing. The conclusion? She was talented at chemistry and music. Since she didn't want to teach music, however, he suggested she pursue science as a career and music as an avocation.

"I'm glad I took the path I took," she said.

While she was at Bryn Mawr she noticed an ad in The Philadelphia Inquirer calling for singers to audition for the Philadelphia Orchestra Chorus.

"I thought, why not?" she said, and went off to the Curtis Institute with no sheet music or prepared song.

When she arrived, "everyone was sitting around studying scores," and she began to have misgivings. When she was called to audition with the late William Smith, the renowned associate conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, he gruffly asked her if she had brought something to sing. Since she hadn't, he told her to sing "My County 'Tis of Thee."

Afterward, she said, "he asked me if I ever studied voice, and when I said no, he said, 'Well, you should.'"

Convinced she had blown it, she laughed about it afterwards. Then, a week later, she received a postcard saying she had been accepted. Soon she began voice lessons, studying with six teachers over many years.

While the professional gig only lasted two years, since the Philadelphia Orchestra Chorus was dissolved after that, it was the beginning of Greenberg's second life.

She followed Smith, who became a close friend and mentor, to the Mendelssohn Club, a venerable chorus in Philadelphia, where he conducted and she sang under him and then under Henry Smith, Robert Page (her other musical hero, who just passed away on Aug. 7) and Tamara Brooks. In her 22 years with them, she was a 14-year member of the board and president for four years.

In 1982, when the Mendelssohn Club began to experience difficulties, Greenberg and a few other singers decided to form a chorus of their own and call it the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia; they pulled together a 23-member board, recruited 85 singers and hired conductor Sean Deibler.

They were invited the following year to appear with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Smith, and continued over the years to grow, winning the Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence under the second conductor, Donald Nally.

Greenberg, the founder, served as founding president of the board for four years, and as a board member for 20 years, in addition to performing with them.

Now called Choral Arts Philadelphia, the group performs as a chamber chorus under Matthew Glandorf, rather than as a symphonic chorus.

After she moved to the Reading area, Greenberg founded the Greater Reading Encore Chorale, a chorus for senior singers, in 2012, with music director David Rutt. She performs with that group and, since 2014, with the Reading Choral Society, of which she is a member of the advisory board.